

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending April 17, 2010

Kingdom - Dutch MFA Finally Talked to Venezuelan Authorities

Dutch Foreign Minister Verhagen said, during his visit to Brazil last week, that a senior Dutch official had finally talked to the Venezuelan government after Caracas had held off any contact with the Dutch government for months. He told Venezuela that the Kingdom of the Netherlands intends to extend the counter-drug Forward Operating Location (USFOL) agreement with the U.S.

At Verhagen's request, Brazil also talked to Chavez about the accusation that the U.S. is preparing an attack from the Netherlands Antilles. In January the Americans were accused of violating Venezuelan airspace with a flight that left Curacao. "That is incorrect," said Verhagen. "Chavez used a Wikipedia photo from 2002 to sustain his claim. Now that we are received again in Caracas, we can explain why cooperation with the Americans is necessary. Their planes track down drug shipments and our coast guard intercepts them. Last year, this concerned 224,000 kilos of cocaine. About 40% of the cocaine trade to Europe goes via the Caribbean. It is of major importance that the (USFOL) agreement is extended. I have just sent the proposal to parliament."

Verhagen considered war with Venezuela "highly improbable, even though we should think about all options." In his opinion, Chavez merely used the Antilles to distract attention from domestic problems caused by a lower oil price. "Meanwhile, his navy works with us."

Last week, Chavez ordered US \$5.1 million worth of weapons from Russia. "It is a very different story that Venezuela keeps buying large quantities of weapons. For two years now, I have not given permission for any arms sales to that country." Verhagen saw no reason however to strengthen the military capabilities in the Antilles. He has faith in a moderating role played by Brazil. (Various media)

Curacao – USFOL Hosts Curacao Youth Air Brigade

The U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) in Curacao sponsored a tour of their facility March 30 for the Youth Air Brigade. 30+ cadets and leaders were given clearance to tour the facility, receive a mission briefing, tour two different aircraft (E-3 AWACS, KC-135 tanker), and one of the fire trucks. USFOL flight crew members were on hand to answer the many questions offered up by the cadets. One cadet in the mission brief asked, "Is it possible for one of us to ever fly those planes?" The commander, Lt. Col. Mike Price said, "I am not sure but there is a program whereby foreign nationals can enter the U.S. military as enlisted members and then apply for US citizenship but you would have to check if that applies to Dutch citizens." All in all it was a banner day with bridges built and reestablished between the USFOL and the Curacao Youth Air Brigade. Youth Air Brigade leader Sherwin Gerard was very grateful for this opportunity for his cadets and commented, "This tour has meant so much to us and we have wanted this type of relationship with the USFOL for quite a while. Thanks for making the effort to invite us here today and making this contribution to the lives of these cadets." The USFOL plans to continue to offer these tours periodically to cadets in the future. (Various media)

Curacao – Shoreline Cleanup by USFOL Results in Clean Beaches and Koredor

The U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) in Curacao partnered with several area hotels to clean up the shoreline from the Hilton down to the Renaissance on March 20. This area includes the full area of the Koredor. Leading the effort was the Hotel Marriott with manager John Toti, the event's primary organizer. Also joining the effort was the Floris Suite Hotel and Hilton Hotel. The USFOL participated with over 50 volunteers including Commander Lt. Col. Mike Price, combing the shoreline and beach from the Holiday Beach Hotel to the Renaissance. Significant cleanup was also accomplished around the ball field near the Holiday Beach Hotel. Mr. Toti said, "It is our hope that this will be a great step in cleanup towards "Earth Day" which will occur in the month of April. We also hope that the people of Curacao will help keep this area clean and beautiful after this tremendous effort by so many." In all, two dumpsters were filled with old wooden pallets, tires, glass, and trash of all types. This is but one more example of how the USFOL is partnering with the Curacao local community to "make a difference" in the lives of those who call Curacao home. (Various media)

Aruba – Cruise Tourism Declines

The number of cruise passengers visiting Aruba in March dropped, compared to last year, by almost 19,000 to 77,523. The number of visiting ships also declined in March from 47 to 41, but the Q1 2010, cruise ship calls decline was negligible (136 to 135). The number of cruise passengers visiting during Q1 2010, dropped by 31,987 to 246,507, compared to the same quarter last year. (Various media)

Curacao – Technical Issues at Isla Refinery Continue; Startup Delayed Again

The Venezuelan state-owned oil company PdVSA-operated Isla refinery continues experiencing technical problems which caused various disruptions and a refinery shut down last month. The BOO (Build, Own and Operate) plant - owned by Utility Company Aqualectra and Japanese Trading Company Marubini - that produces electricity, steam, desalinated water, and compressed air for the Isla Refinery and up to several megawatts for the national grid, is the cause of the incidents.

The BOO cannot start-up, because compressors it rented in the U.S. will not arrive on the island, as earlier expected on April 15, but much later, an Isla Refinery spokesperson said. The entire repair and maintenance process could take up to five months. (Amigoe) Also, only one of the three boilers used for electricity and steam production is currently operational. The BOO currently supplies the refinery with sufficient steam and electricity to operate the offices and perform maintenance. The current seven-week production standstill causes a multi-million US dollar deficit for Isla. (Various media)

Aruba - Petrobras Not Interested in Purchasing Valero

"Petrobras will not purchase the US-owned Valero refinery, but remains interested in cooperation", Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Verhagen (CDA) said. According to Aruban PM Eman, Verhagen stated that Petrobras is open for „other alternatives that could lead to cooperation between Valero and Petrobras”.

Eman mentioned the possibility of a joint venture and said that Aruba Finance, Utilities, Communication and Energy Minister Mike de Meza left for Brazil with a Valero delegation to discuss various options. Premier Eman is very positive about the Dutch involvement in this matter and said that it is difficult to find a good solution for the oil refinery during the current economical times. (Various media)

Curacao – Businesses Searched for IPR Violations

The Public Prosecutors Office, in cooperation with Law Enforcement Agencies, has raided various businesses in search of Intellectual Property Rights violations. Various counterfeit products, representing 80 different brands and other merchandise were confiscated for lack of filing the necessary paperwork and duties paid, according to a Public Prosecution spokesperson. It is not uncommon that counterfeit merchandise is illegally sold on the market. (Various media)

Curacao - U.S. FOL Staff Donates Bibles to El Bethel Church

Staff of the U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) in Curacao donated 430 English bibles and bible study aids to the El Bethel Church in Mahaai, on March 24. Chaplain, Captain Brad Phillips from the Chaplain's office at the USFOL presented the Bibles to the pastor of the El Bethel Church, Norvell Fornerino in a special presentation ceremony. Pastor Fornerino was very grateful and said, "We thank the U.S. Air Force for these bibles and study guides. We will use them to teach the Word of God to all our members in the days and weeks to come as we build the kingdom of God." Pastor Fornerino has also preached in the "English speaking" service held at the Holiday Beach Hotel, where Chaplain Phillips preaches each Sunday morning at 9:15. (Extra, Daily Herald)

Curacao – Sufficient Fuel Supply in Stock; No Reason For Concern

Isla Refinery spokesperson Kenneth Gijsbertha said the Venezuelan state-owned oil company PdVSA-operated Isla refinery has at least a two-month fuel supply in stock to support Curacao and Bonaire. He projected that the compressors the refinery rented in the U.S. will arrive at the end of this month. Nevertheless, it is the refinery policy and priority to guarantee a sufficient fuel supply for Curacao and Bonaire. There is no reason for concern, Gijsberta stated. (Extra)

Aruba – Second Six-Year Term for Governor Refunjol Approved

The Kingdom Council of Ministers has approved a second six-year term for Aruban Governor Fredis Jose Refunjol upon request of the Aruban government. Refunjol was born in Aruba on December 19, 1950. He started his professional career as a teacher and became a high school principal in 1981. Refunjol became a member of the MEP party in 1983 and was a MEP MP from 1986 till 1989. He was Public Welfare Minister and Education and Administrative Affairs Minister for the MEP before he accepted the nomination to become Governor in 2004. Refunjol is married to Clarette Lopez and has two children. His personal interests are community center activities and sports. (Amigoe)

Aruba – Various Companies Interested in Valero Purchase

Aruban Finance, Utilities, Communication and Energy Minister Mike de Meza said, prior to his Brazil trip to discuss a possible US-owned Valero Refinery sale, that various parties are interested in a purchase. De Meza stated that Petrobras, PdVSA, and Pacific Rubiales have all showed interest. (Extra)

Kingdom – Dutch Second Chamber Consents to Dissolution of Netherlands Antilles

After a week of debate, a majority of the Dutch Second Chamber of Parliament voted for a range of legislative proposals to dissolve the Netherlands Antilles. The October 10, 2010 dissolution target date is still feasible, various actors said. One amendment, accepted by a majority of the parties, involved the continued presence of the Dutch-led Criminal Investigation Cooperation Team (RST) which will remain active on the Antilles for four more years instead of the previous 2-year plan, in an attempt to create time to establish a Communal Police Provision (GVP) for tracing and combating organized crime on the new overseas Kingdom entities.

Opposition parties SP, PVV and VVD voted against. The administrators of Curacao and St. Maarten have made a mess of it, argued SP spokesman Van Raak. He asserted that both islands were not yet ready for an autonomous status within the Kingdom now that the financial and social problems have not yet been resolved. VVD spokesman Remkes agreed. "St. Maarten is too small for autonomy and does not have its business in order." PVV spokesman Brinkman pleaded for total independence for the Antilles so that the Antilleans themselves could deal with the "corrupt elite." Netherlands Antilles PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage was pleased and said that a big step was taken in the Netherlands Antilles dissolution process.

The legislative proposals are still to be approved by the Dutch First Chamber of Parliament which is considered a formality, and a Round Table Conference just prior to 10-10-10 should seal the new Kingdom constellation. (Various media)

Curacao – Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System Station Planned for Curacao

Netherlands Antilles Telecommunications and Transportation Minister Patrick Illidge said that the Curacao Port Authorities presented a proposal for a seismic station at the Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for a Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (ICG/CARIBE EWS-V) meeting. The project is supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), University of Puerto Rico, and the University of Hawaii Sea Level Center (UHSLC). Data gathered by the seismic station will be worldwide disseminated via the Meteorological Global Telecommunication System (GTS). The list of the core seismic stations of the CARIBE EWS contains 124 stations, of these 91 are currently contributing to the CARIBE EWS. (Government Press Release)

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CURAÇAO

Crime April 9 – 15

On April 9 two men fired several shots at the occupants of two vehicles in Joonchi. One victim was injured. The motive for the shooting is unknown. On April 14 three men robbed a snackbar in Juan Hato (Extra, Amigoe, Antilliaans Dagblad).

ARUBA

Crime April 9 – 15

On April 11 two youngsters on bicycles attempted to rob a tourist near the Hyatt Hotel. When the victim resisted, they fled the area (Diario Aruba, Awe Mainta).

ST. MAARTEN

Crime April 9 – 15

On April 9 a man attempted to rob a business in Philipsburg. The suspect fled the area after an unsuccessful struggle with the intended victim. The following afternoon two men robbed a jewelry store in Philipsburg. On April 14 two men robbed a Chinese grocery store in Sucker Garden (Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."